

Message Text

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4378

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS DIA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, LE, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIA IN LEBANON

REF: (A) CAIRO 9129, (B) BEIRUT 5917

1. SUMMARY: ALL EVIDENCE SUGGESTS SYRIA INTENDS REMAIN IN LEBANON WITH MAJOR MILITARY FORCE FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE. DOMESTIC OPPONENTS THIS POLICY ARE UNDER CONTROL. REPORTED SYRIAN PROPOSITIONS TO SOFAR CONFERENCE SUPPORT VIEW THAT SYRIA WILL CONTINUE TO TOUGH IT OUT. END SUMMARY.

2. WE CONCUR WITH FAHMY THAT SYRIANS ARE DETERMINED TO STAY IN LEBANON (CAIRO REFTEL). ASAD HAS SHOWN NO HINT OF WAVERING FROM HIS DECISION TO MAINTAIN A SUBSTANTIAL SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN LEBANON AT LEAST UNTIL A COUNTRY-WIDE CEASE-FIRE IS EFFECTIVE AND TO LEAVE ONLY WHEN LEBANON'S DULY CONSTITUTED AUTHORITIES (SARKIS) ARE FUNCTIONING AND SO REQUEST IT. JALLUD'S REPORTED STATEMENT IN LEBANESE PRESS THAT

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SYRIANS HAD AGREED TO WITHDRAW, GETTING IN RETURN ONLY REESTABLISH-

MENT OF SAIQA, STRIKES US EITHER AS MISREPORTING BY THE BEIRUT PRESS OR AS A HIGHLY INGENUOUS VIEW OF THE LIBYAN PRIMIN WHO AFTER A MONTH OF MEDIATION BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND BEIRUT SHOULD KNOW BETTER (BEIRUT REFTEL PARA 5).

3. SUGGEST, HOWEVER, JUDGMENT BE RESERVED ON ACCURACY OF FAHMY'S OTHER ASSERTION THAT ASAD'S "SYSTEM" WOULD COLLAPSE WERE HE TO WITHDRAW WITHOUT PROVING THAT HIS INTERVENTION HAD BROUGHT BENEFITS TO SYRIA AS WELL AS INCREASED STABILITY TO LEBANON. WE HAVE REPORTED STEADILY ON THE UNREST HERE AND SYRIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON HAS GIVEN DOMESTIC DISSIDENTS A NEW TARGET ON WHICH TO FOCUS. BUT THE INTERNAL SITUATION OF SYRIA REMAINS MURKY AND NOT SO EASILY DEFINED AS FAHMY HAS SOUGHT TO DO. THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAVE PASSED WITHOUT ANTI-REGIME DEMONSTRATIONS OR FURTHER BOMBING INCIDENTS SUCH AS OCCURRED IN MID-JUNE. IRAQI MANEUVERS ON THE BORDER HAVE FAILED TO PROVOKE AN UPRISING AGAINST ASAD--IN FACT THEY PROBABLY STIMULATED GREATER COHESION OF SYRIAN OFFICER CORPS--JUST AS ASAD'S TROOP MANEUVERS IN EASTERN SYRIA IN THE SPRING OF 1975 FAILED TO DO THE SAME IN BAGHDAD. (BOTH IRAQI AND SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES DESERVE LOW GRADES FOR THEIR ABILITY TO PREDICT FLASH POINTS OF DOMESTIC DISSIDENCE IN EACH OTHER'S COUNTRIES.) ASAD'S OPPONENTS, AT HOME AND ABROAD, HAVE YET TO OBTAIN ANY NOTABLE UNITY. DOMESTIC DISSIDENTS ARE FURTHERMORE, BEING CLOSELY SURVEILLED.

4. LOCAL AP STRINGER, WHO CLAIMS GOOD CONTACTS IN SYRIAN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN HIERARCHY AND WHOSE REPORTS HAVE OCCASIONALLY PROVIDED US WITH ACCURATE INSIGHTS INTO THE MANEUVERS OF THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP, HAS FURNISHED AMBASSADOR FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF JULY 4 SOFAR CONFERENCE. SOURCE SAYS THAT FONMIN KHADDAM ARRIVED AT SOFAR WITH THREE PROPOSITIONS:

(A) IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE;

(B) IMMEDIATE POLITICAL TALKS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS;

(C) DEMAND THAT ARAB LEAGUE TAKE "ADEQUATE MEASURES" TO ENFORCE PREVIOUS AGREEMENTS (I.E., CAIRO ACCORDS) AND
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PUNISH ANY ELEMENTS IN LEBANON WHICH VIOLATE CEASE-FIRE.

5. AP STRINGER COMMENTED THAT FIRST TWO CONDITIONS BESPOKE SYRIAN CONFIDENCE THAT THEY COULD BRING THEIR LEBANESE CHRISTIAN CLIENTS ALONG, BOTH TO OBSERVE CEASE-FIRE AND ENTER INTO SERIOUS POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS. HE INTERPRETED THE THIRD PROPOSITION AS A BLUNT INVITATION THAT THE LEAGUE FORMALLY AGREE TO ADOPT SYRIA AS ITS STRONG ARM IN LEBANON. SARG CONSIDERS IT

SELF EVIDENT THAT INTERNAL ARAB WORLD RIVALRIES WILL NOT ALLOW ANY STATE OTHER THAN SYRIA TO ACT AS THE ENFORCER OF EARLIER AGREEMENTS AFFECTING GOL AND NO ONE ELSE CAN FIELD THE FORCE NECESSARY TO PUT DOWN VIOLATORS OF THE CEASE-FIRE.

6. MEANWHILE, ARAB LEAGUE EFFORTS CONTINUE HERE. THE LAST ROUND WAS HELD THE NIGHT OF JULY 6 BETWEEN MAHMOUD RIYAD AND THE TUNISIAN AND BAHRAINI FONMINS IN A SESSION ATTENDED BY SYRIAN DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER NAJI JAMIL, HASSAN SABRI AL-KHOULI AND EGYPTIAN GENERAL GHUNAYM. THEY REPORTEDLY DISCUSSED HOW TO LIMIT THE ESCALATION OF FIGHTING IN ORDER TO RECONVENE A FURTHER MEETING OF THE WARRING FACTIONS ORIGINALLY SET FOR JULY 5 IN SOFAR. FURTHER SESSION OF THE TRIPARTITE COMMITTEE WAS HELD JULY 7; AFTER WHICH TUNISIAN AND BAHRAINI FONMINS ANNOUNCED PLANS TO DEPART FOR HOME; KHOULI AND GHUNAYM DEPARTED FOR BEIRUT LAST NIGHT, BUT RETURNED FOR THIS MORNING'S CONFERENCE.

7. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT KHADDAM'S PROPOSITIONS, IF ACCE # EELS # REPORTED, CONTAIN A GOOD MEASURE OF BLUFF. SYRIAN AUTHORITY OVER THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS IS YET TO BE DEMONSTRATED IN A SITUATION WHERE THEIR RESPECTIVE VIEWS OF A DESIRABLE SOLUTION MIGHT DIVERGE. NONETHELESS, FONMIN'S REPORTED PROPOSITIONS ONLY REINFORCE OUR BELIEF THAT SYRIA INTENDS TO TOUGH IT OUT AND STAY PUT MILITARILY IN LEBANON FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

8. AL INVOLVEMENT , INTENDED TO LIMIT AND PERHAPS EVEN TO END SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION, HAS INSTEAD REVEALED ITS INEFFECTIVENESS. AL STILL UNABLE TO FIELD A MILITARY FORCE THAT COULD FUNCTION AS PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE TO SYRIAN MILITARY. SHOOT-OUT BETWEEN SUDANESE AND LIBYAN TROOPS,
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WHICH SYRIAN PRESS HAS DENIED, BUT WHICH AMERICAN CORRESPONDANT CONFIRMS TO US ON BASIS HIS INTERVIEWS WITH TWO EYE WITNESSES, REINFORCES IMPRESSION OF LEAGUE'S INABILITY TO COPE WITH LEBANESE COMPLEXITIES. IN SYRIAN EYES, EVIDENT LACK OF SUCCESS IN AL MISSION AND INABILITY OF LEBANESE TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS UNAIDED, JUSTIFIES SYRIA AS CONSIDERING ITS ARMY THE ONLY ONE BOTH WILLING AND HAVING SOME PRETENTIONS TO BEING ABLE TO REESTABLISH SEMBLANCE OF ORDER TO LEBANON.
MURPHY

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